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SUBJECT: FRENCH MFA WELCOMES USG ENGAGEMENT ON UN REFORM,  
WORRIES USG MAY BOYCOTT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

REF: A. STATE 4745 B. STATE 4746

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah B. Rosenblatt. Reas  
ons 1.4b,d

1. (SBU) Political Minister-Counselor discussed demarche points on January 18 with French IO A/S-Equivalent Sylvie Bermann (Ref A). Joining Bermann were desk officers Donatienne Hissard and Nicolas Kassianides, who respectively handle human rights issues and Security Council reform. Bermann and Hissard underscored that they welcomed the demarche points, which they hoped signaled renewed USG engagement on reform of the UN Human Rights Commission, essential if there is to be any headway by the late February target date.

2. (C) Bermann and Hissard expressed serious concern at a report emanating from the EC that the USG would boycott a possible next session of the Human Rights Commission if there has not been an "orderly transition" to a Human Rights Council (HRC). USG absence, according to Bermann, would be a disaster (and a gift horse to the PRC). Concerning the eventual size of the Human Rights Council, Hissard said France preferred an HRC of no fewer than 45 members. Anything less would limit WEOG participation. Bermann and Hissard also opined that agreeing on human rights criteria for election was tricky. Many in the EU, for instance, might want abolition of the death penalty to be a requirement for HRC election.

3. (C) Bermann made a point of introducing Kassianides in terms of his new IO responsibilities in readying a referral of Iran to the Security Council. Kassianides had attended 16 January London meetings on Iran -- the first time that the MFA IO department had taken part, Bermann said. Kassianides volunteered that the EU-3 were working jointly on an IAEA resolution that would be circulated in draft in Vienna in advance of the 2/2 BOG. Bermann said SC referral should be seen as the "normal" next step, with the EU-3 mediation efforts a parenthetical chapter in the process. She commented on the need for constant contact with SYG Annan in coming weeks in order to keep him on message.

4. (C) On Security Council reform, Bermann reaffirmed French commitment to the G-4 resolution. She emphasized French solidarity with Germany in its aim for permanent membership, a sine qua non for any Council reform, which was in itself essential for re-energizing the United Nations. Bermann commented that the G-4 resolution also offered the best outcome overall for African interests, despite the continent's internal divisions. Bermann and Kassianides inquired about Japanese consultations with the USG on Council reform, asking if the GOF could get an update.

5. (C) Regarding the selection of Annan's successor, Bermann volunteered that France was only beginning to look at the various Asian candidates. She advised deferring discussion into the next General Assembly for fear that Annan would otherwise become an ineffectual lame duck. She was gratified that the USG had backed off from its alleged aim to settle on Annan's successor by June. Bermann said she looked forward to consultations with A/S Silverberg in the near future, suggesting the possibility of a February visit to New York and Washington.

6. (C) Guidance Request: Post requests guidance in response to A/S-equivalent Bermann's concern about a possible boycott of the UN Human Rights Commission if it has not been replaced this summer by a new Human Rights Council.

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Stapleton